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ABSTRACT

The goals of a cross-age tutoring program involving first and fifth graders were to stimulate oral language development in first graders and to help them read for meaning. The fifth grade students worked with the younger students on a one-to-one basis to stimulate language development and to encourage the academic growth in other skills necessary for beginning reading. Wordless picture books were used to help develop the cognitive and affective skills important for beginning readers, such as sequencing, predicting, developing vocabulary, determining cause and effect, expanding sentences, identifying pattern repetition, determining main ideas, and making judgments. The educational benefits of the program and the value of one particular type of wordless picture may be understood within the framework of the five essential ingredients for program success: knowledge and planning, selection of appropriate materials, training, on-going monitoring and support, and evaluation. (EL)

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"Cross-Age Tutoring With
Wordless Picture Books"

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CROSS AGE TUTORING WITH WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS

Language facility is one of the most important factors in beginning reading. This skill develops if students have ample opportunities to interact orally with a person who is attentive and responsive (Wells, 1976). With thirty students in a classroom, teachers do not have the time to work with students on a one-to-one basis for a sustained period of time. Paraprofessionals do not exist in many schools because of budget cuts and parents are not available to volunteer their time. Within every school however, there is a solution to this problem - other students. This is a powerful source of help for the teachers. Older students can work with younger students on a one-to-one basis to stimulate language development and encourage academic growth in other skills necessary for beginning reading.

This article describes a cross-age tutoring program involving first and fifth graders. The goals of the program were (1) to stimulate oral language in first graders and (2) to help the first graders "read" for meaning. The educational benefits of the program and the value of one particular type of material - wordless picture books, are discussed within the framework of the five essential ingredients for program success: knowledge and planning,

selection of appropriate materials, training, on-going monitoring and support, and evaluation. A wordless picture book bibliography and a cross-age tutoring bibliography are provided for those who might want to collect the books and obtain more information about implementing a program like the one discussed.

Knowledge and Planning

Dr. George Washington Carver Elementary School was designated by the San Francisco Unified School District as an urban laboratory school. The library at the school housed approximately 50 wordless picture books that were not being used intensively, or systematically. The teachers, principal and librarian wanted to put these books to better use as a part of an overall plan to expand the use of children's literature. Faculty members from the University were released part-time by the Dean to help the school faculty increase their knowledge about wordless picture books and devise a program for using these materials. Cross-age tutoring seemed to be a promising approach for meeting student needs and supplementing the basic program. One fifth grade teacher and two first grade teachers indicated that they wanted to pilot the cross-age tutoring program using wordless picture books. Approximately sixty first graders and thirty fifth graders were participants.

Wordless Picture Books. The genre of wordless picture books is nearly fifty years old (Hopkins, 1979). Yet it has been only recently that these books have been discussed as vehicles for enhancing the reading and writing process with elementary students.

Several researchers have examined the specific skills that children acquire when "reading" wordless picture books. Larrick (1976) suggests that pre-schoolers learn how to handle books, move from left to right as they turn the pages and that oral language is stimulated as children describe what they see. According to Degler (1979) wordless books can be used to help develop cognitive and affective skills important for beginning readers. Picture books without words insure successful "reading" experiences so that a positive attitude toward books is established. These are no fail encounters with books. In addition, children learn to "read" for literal and inferential messages, evaluate a character's actions, understand interrelationships of concepts presented, and increase vocabulary. The end result is that when wordless picture books are used with beginning readers, various thinking strategies are employed which prepare children for formal reading when it is introduced.

Abrahamson (1981) suggests that the use of picture books without words may also be a diagnostic tool for the

teacher. As the child "reads" the story the teacher will gain insight into the students language competence. In addition, wordless picture books can be used in implementing a language experience approach so that reading and writing skills are developed. For beginning readers, the story can be told from the pictures alone and a single word, phrase or sentence can be written about the story. D'Angelo (1979) discusses some possible ways that both younger and older students benefit in writing about the wordless picture books.

Read and Smith (1982) suggest the importance of visual literacy and present visual and reading skill elements as found in picture books without words. The authors discuss illustrative elements of strong detail, symbolism, space and color which help to create the tone of the story and contribute to visual literacy. Reading skills that they view as inherent in the books include sequencing, noting details, determining main idea, making inferences, drawing conclusions, noting cause and effect and making judgements. According to Arthur (1982) wordless picture books also provide the student with an opportunity to predict outcomes.

Wordless picture books are available for a wide range of "readers". For children at the readiness levels, Anno's Counting Book is a good choice. The beautiful water color

illustrations focus on the numbered objects and the child has the opportunity to count the objects presented on each page which correlate with the written numeral.

For the child who recognizes that the same character appears throughout the book (but is not quite ready to understand sequencing) the book Oops! should prove helpful. The collection of "oops" experiences are humorous and children also delight in the rhythmic "oops" to say when yet another disaster has befallen the main character.

As children grow into realizing that a story is a sequence of events, one might begin with Pancakes for Breakfast, One Frog Too Many, The Adventures of Paddy Pork or Bobo's Dream.

Wordless picture books are not only for the pre-reader and beginning reader. Teachers who examine The Gray Lady and the Strawberry Snatcher, The Hunter and the Animals, The Great Ape, Victorians Abroad, or Lavinia's Cottage begin to realize the level of sophistication required to appreciate the books and that they can serve as excellent language experience activities for children in the upper grades as well.

As one studies picture books without words, one realizes how pleasurable, varied, plentiful and instructive they are for use in teaching reading and writing skills.

Cross-Age Tutoring Cross-age tutoring is the teaching learning process where students serve as tutors to provide help to another student (Bohning, 1982). Older students help younger students in a cross-age tutoring program. The program can involve one pair or many pairs of students. The fact that cross-age tutoring works has been well documented (Dillner, 1972; Elliott, 1973; Robertson, 1971). Cross-age tutoring benefits academic and social growth, acceptance for responsibility, increased self-worth, and social understanding. At the same time it meets individual needs, provides individual attention and is academically productive while being personally enjoyable. A meta-analysis of sixty-five school tutoring programs reveals positive effects on the academic performance and attitudes for those who receive tutoring and those who serve as tutors (Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik, 1983). Students gained a better understanding of and developed more positive attitudes toward the material covered in the tutorial program. The studies reviewed had programs that had to take place in classrooms.

Selection of Appropriate Material

The selection of appropriate material was a top priority because materials carry the real opportunity to learn and influence the effectiveness of the tutors. The

materials provide the intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction for having completed a task successfully.

First, wordless picture books were selected because they could meet the needs of the students and were consistent with the curriculum goals of the school. Secondly, the materials were inherently systematic and provided an organized sequence with a built-in oral language component. The wordless picture books could be used in such a way that they would lead to independent use on the part of the tutor. The desired behaviors could easily be modeled and there was a range of possible responses allowing the maximum opportunity for success. Finally, the materials allow for human interaction rather than a drill response. This contributes significantly to the sustaining of interest in the tutoring session.

Training

Trained tutors are much more effective in interpersonal relationships and the ability to attain the desired cognitive gains (Niedermeyer and Ellis, 1971). Tutors need to be provided with clear directions, a specific learning task to complete, and specific materials. During the training session the appropriate tutoring behavior needs to be modeled and a variety of learning activities used. Role playing and peer tutoring with feedback are beneficial.

The project activities began with an orientation

program for six (randomly selected) fifth graders. At this session the students were told that the project centered around stimulating oral language in first graders and that "reading" for meaning was an essential ingredient of the program. Through discussion the fifth graders learned why it was important to stimulate oral language and that it was a goal to have the first graders speak in complete sentences. Comprehension skills were described as "reading for meaning" and various techniques and strategies were presented to assist the children in their tutoring. These strategies were discussed in conjunction with the wordless picture book One Frog Too Many and included: sequencing, prediction, vocabulary development determining cause and effect, expanding sentences, repetition of patterns, determining main idea and making judgments. (These skills were reinforced throughout the semester, during weekly meetings.) The group decided that the first graders might enjoy illustrating their favorite part of the story and that the first graders would dictate a sentence (or more) about the drawing. In this way, a language experience approach become an integral part of the project.

Ongoing Monitoring and Support

The next major step involved establishing a routine and plan of action for meeting with the first

graders. The fifth graders selected the wordless picture book to be presented, and appeared at the first grade classroom at 1:00 P.M. everydzy. The first grader would have his/her paper and crayons ready and the first grade teacher designated a quiet area for the students to work together. After introducing themselves, the first grader begins "reading" the wordless picture book with the older student stimulating oral language and development using the ideas presented at the orientation session. Then the first grader illustrated his or her favorite part and dictated a sentence to the fifth grader. In the case of a bilingual first grader who wasn't speaking complete sentences, words and phrases were encouraged. The session lasted for one-half hour.

For purposes of logistics, a blank calendar was distributed to the fifth graders at the orientation session and they volunteered for specific dates. Their names were recorded on the dates and xeroxed copies of the calendar were given to the teachers involved in the project so that they knew which children were scheduled to appear in the classroom.

The first grade teachers introduced their students to the project by "reading" a wordless picture book to the class as a whole.

The teacher explained that after "reading" the book they could illustrate their favorite part and dictate a sentence about the drawing. These first grade teachers then asked their students to volunteer (they all did!) and wrote their names on the calendar. The match was now complete for tutor and tutee every day at 1:00 P.M. for a month.

The six fifth graders who were the initial tutors taught another classmate how to perform with the first grader who was being tutored. This meant that at certain times, two fifth graders were present with one first grader for a tutoring session. In this way the entire fifth grade class became "educated and trained" in the project. One of the consultants met weekly with groups of six fifth graders to provide for more individual attention. Problems and concerns were expressed at these weekly meetings and solutions were offered by the group.

The fifth grade boys and girls proved to be responsible students with varying abilities. The weekly meetings suggested that they were actively engaged in stimulating oral language development. This was also evidenced by the crayon drawings and sentence dictation. One fifth grader designed a "skill" sheet for the group that reflected the ideas discussed at the orientation meeting. This included a place to record the name of the student, date, and title of the wordless picture book used. (They were

teachers in the making!)).

In addition to making the older students aware of the skills essential to reading for meaning as discussed earlier in this article, the consultant also used the handbook Literature and Story Writing to help the fifth graders extend their concepts of literature. Their teacher used the handbook as well for exploring literature with them in the classroom.

Evaluation

It was observed that all of the students enjoyed participating in the project. The children found the one-to-one tutoring sessions special. They enjoyed the variety of books and the first graders also enjoyed the language experience activity with sentence dictation. One fifth grader suggested that the younger students select their own wordless picture book so that they could "read" it before the tutoring session.

The teacher also expressed satisfaction with the project. They remarked how pleased the first graders were to share their language experience activity with the others. All of the teacher evaluators have asked for the project to continue next year and a first grade teacher has volunteered to coordinate the "Wordless Picture Book Project."

For the consultants, the project was one that enabled

positive growth on the part of students and teachers alike.

Teachers who participated were interviewed and commented:

"Literature is vital to the school curriculum.
Kids love it."

"The students take books to recess and sit
on the bench."

"The children don't fool with puzzles-they get books."

"I learned the students could do things inde-
pendently."

"I raised my expectations of what the students can do."

And the children's comments included:

"I really like doing this with the first graders. I
hope you'll let the next fifth graders help."

"The little boy I helped asked when I would come back."

Literature is a primary source of material for building
reading readiness and wordless picture books help children
make sense out of their world.

The consultants were pleased to have assisted in enhancing
reading and writing skills through the use of wordless
picture books in classrooms at Dr. George Washington Carver
Laboratory School.

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* Pop-up or movable-page books

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DR. GEROGE WASHINGTON CARVER LABORATORY SCHOOL
FALL 1982

QUESTIONNAIRE
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

1. Please list the books that you have read to your students:

2. Did you extend any of the books in a creative way?

3. How did you do this?

4. Do you think children's literature should be part of a school curriculum?
Why or why not?

5. Which of the following would you like to learn more about:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Storytelling
(Storytellers Club for Students) | ☐ Wordless Picture Books |
| ☐ Poetry | ☐ Judy Blume's Books |
| ☐ Reader's Theater | ☐ Fairy Tales |
| ☐ Creative Ways to Extend Books | ☐ California Young Reader Medal |
| ☐ Webbing | ☐ Books and Filmstrips |
| ☐ Bookmaking with children | |
| ☐ Multi-Ethnic Literature | |
| ☐ Individualized Reading | |

6. Any other areas that you would like specific information?